

## **Inside and out: a critical analysis of social capital**

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### **Abstract**

Divergent narratives from a former coal-mining 'community' in the North East of England are analysed using Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital. Thirty-three research participants (20 females; 13 males) took part in 15 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups over a six-month period (May and October 2011). The research findings showed that social capital can be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive for different demographics depending on age, gender, how long they have lived in the area and their (lack of) connection to the former coal-mining community. Social, spatial and temporal processes are important in making sense of these findings.

### **Key words**

Social capital; community; social exclusion; inequalities; Bourdieu

### **Introduction**

While conceptualisations of social capital are widely debated (see Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman 1988; 1990; Putnam, 1993; 1995; 2000) this paper primarily draws on Bourdieu's understanding of social capital to be 'the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable [social] network' (1986, 248). Such resources may include social networks (family, friends, neighbours and colleagues), social support (emotional and practical), reciprocity (being there for each other – neighbourliness) and community facilities (community centres and groups) available to a community to boost civic engagement, participation and cohesiveness. The size of the social network is important since it determines how effectively one can mobilise the amount of capital available to them, but quality of the social relationships within the network is also significant in determining how beneficial these relationships are. Bourdieu considers social capital as a means of further privileging already economically privileged individuals and disadvantaging those who lack economic resources. But if we presuppose that access to social capital provides us with non-economic resources as well both in terms of practical and emotional support in addition to social status then being socially connected is therefore of paramount importance even in areas that otherwise lack economic capital. Social capital is not just a possession of those with more fortunate economic circumstances. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated emotional and practical support as being important in deprived communities (such as MacDonald et al, 2005). Holt (2008) helpfully distinguishes other axes of social identity that transcend class including age, gender, (dis)ability, sexuality and ethnicity and these various forms of embodiment contribute to the (re)production of (dis)advantage; not everything boils down to class. Irrespective of socio-economic circumstances, social capital is not uniformly acquired by everyone (Cairns, 2013); rather, social

capital is differentially distributed across social groups (Lin, 2000), which may include gender, age as well as duration of residence as I demonstrate by the empirical findings from this study.

While there are growing critical accounts of social capital that recognise that it isn't always a good thing, current theorisations are lacking since there is limited research that has explored spatial and temporal dimensions of social capital. This paper examines divergent accounts of social capital relating to social networks and support, reciprocity between neighbours, and civic engagement from local residents and stakeholders using empirical research findings from an in-depth qualitative case study in the North East of England. Social (including social attitudes, values, expectations and obligations), spatial (physical and symbolic environments) and temporal (developments over time) processes are explored.

This paper consists of three central arguments: social capital has the potential to narrow and widen social inequalities by being both inclusive for longstanding and older residents with a shared industrial history and exclusive for newer residents in terms of spatial positioning of housing creating insiders and outsiders; social capital is (de)constructed and shaped by socio-spatial context (industry and housing in this case study); and, social capital can be temporal as we see changes in community cohesiveness over time. Two key constructs used throughout this paper are 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. These provide a useful way of framing the arguments above. They are dependent on age, gender, social status (linked to coal-mining community), and length of residence. In short, the findings reveal that older, longer-term residents (particularly males) engaged in the coal-mining industry had stronger levels of social capital whereas newer residents (often younger) were on the outside (both males and females) and had fewer social networks and support. There were, however, some exceptions to this, primarily for females who drew upon family support and gained access to social networks through other means.

### **Theorising 'social capital'**

Three key theorists who have contributed to debates over what social capital is include Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. Coleman is an American Sociologist who discussed social capital as a set of resources (such as sharing information) found within a social structure, for instance a family or a community, which can come together to create social action (Coleman, 1988; 1990). Similarly, Putnam, a political scientist in the United States, is interested in social capital as a means of collective action through resources within social relations. Putnam states that there are three components that make up social capital: social norms, trust and networks. Putnam (1993; 1995; 2000) distinguishes between 'bonding' and 'bridging' types of social capital. The former refers to unity within homogeneous groups that share similar characteristics and interests, and the latter involves unity between heterogeneous groups. His thesis posits that if a region has a well-functioning economic system and political integration, these are the result of social capital. With the decline of social capital in the United States many social problems have emerged, according to Putnam. In comparison to Coleman and Putnam's largely optimistic and functional descriptions of social capital, Bourdieu is cautious of the functioning of social capital whereby he considers the interplay between social capital and other forms of capital (mainly economic capital) and crucially the ability of social capital to generate disadvantage resulting in a widening of social inequalities through the lack of social integration. Bourdieu (1986) discusses how there are some goods or services for which economic capital provides immediate access, but others can only be obtained by virtue of social relationships and status. Consequently, if one does not have access to such capital providing important resources then disadvantage and inequality may be (re)produced.

The focus of conceptualisations thus far has largely been on social dimensions including social support, networks and ties that generate social capital overlooking the significance of temporal and spatial dimensions in the shaping of social capital, for example in terms of the role of industry and housing regeneration and changes to these over time. Naughton (2014) makes a call for contextually-driven understandings of social capital. The context-dependency of social capital is significant since historical and cultural processes operating over time lead to the (de)construction of social capital in this particular case study – it is not something that can quickly or easily be distilled into a neighbourhood; rather, it is organically borne out of interacting social, cultural and economic factors which change over time. The contexts and environments we live in shape the quality of social relationships; it is not merely quantity but also what types of social networks and resources accrue via membership within the network (Mohan and Mohan, 2002). Exclusive types of social capital may produce negative effects for individuals without membership to a social network, for instance, as well as positive effects for those within a network that provides emotional and practical support. Likewise, being part of a network may not always be beneficial.

The idea that economically deprived areas are not necessarily lacking in other types of resources, namely social, has previously been argued by Cattell (2001). Her study in East London showed that social networks played a mediating role between poverty and poor health. She argues that informal and formal social networks are essential components of social capital as they can provide social support, identity, self-esteem and personal control. However, in more recent work (Cattell, 2011) it is acknowledged that social capital also has the potential to create division in addition to unity. I, too, will demonstrate this through the research findings, which reinforce this notion that social relations are ultimately shaped by the contexts within which individuals live (presently and historically), highlighting the temporal nature of social capital. A Bourdieuien perspective is used to explore the extent to which social capital, characterised by social connectedness – community engagement and participation, social networks, reciprocity and social integration – is present in this otherwise economically disadvantaged case study. The analysis of social capital, however, transcends Bourdieu's original (arguably narrow) focus on social class to consider other attributes that are important in defining social capital. The working definition of social capital used here is the process through which individuals are (un)able to access social, emotional and practical support through access to a social network or a social structure whether that is among like-minded individuals or heterogeneous groups of individuals.

### **Case study: former mining colliery in Northumberland**

The context within which this research has taken place is of paramount importance to make sense of the research findings. This research was undertaken in a semi-rural former coal-mining area situated in Northumberland in the North East of England, with a small population of just over 3,000 people according to Neighbourhood Statistics (2001). 97 per cent of whom are classified as white British and 41.32 per cent long-term unemployed (compared to national average of 30.26 per cent) in 2001. Note that the ward boundary has been modified since the 2001 UK census, so current population figures may vary, although they have not changed considerably. Coal-mining had a major dominance in this locality and permeated through into community life. Gilbert (1995) talks of the stereotypical conceptions of mining communities: 'tightly-knit single-industry communities, socially and often geographically isolated and distinctive' (p 51). While it is recognised that not all former mining communities can be described as such due to how divergent some mining settlements were, this statement depicts this particular ex-mining community quite well. Dennis et al's oft-cited 1956 book entitled *Coal is our life* is a classic British study of coal-mining in Yorkshire, England, which

reveals the cohesiveness that formed from 'common memories of past struggle' (p 14) in relation to acrimonious coal-mining industrial disputes.

De-industrialisation followed the closure of collieries in the 1960s and 1970s. This not only had profound economic implications for this area and many other locales in the region but social relations and social structure also started to change in these areas. Housing regeneration immediately followed the closure of the colliery in this area and involved the relocation of previous residents to a new location within the same area. A former resident and ex-miner talks of the 'social engineering' process that accompanied the relocation of residents, where he said that the Morpeth Rural District Council wanted to almost re-create the sense of place that existed in the former colliery by naming entire rows of houses after those that had been in place previously.

Further housing regeneration took place during the 1990s in two phases through two large housing schemes: Sustainable Homes and Grainger Trust Plc. Phase one of housing regeneration involved the creation of innovative Scandinavian housing as well as refurbishing ex-council properties and detached Dunelm Castle Homes' properties. It was a collaborative project between the Northumberland Strategic Partnership and Castle Morpeth Borough Council. In phase two a private housing provider was granted permission to build a further 105 properties exceeding 200 properties in total. It provided affordable housing with shared equity schemes to attract a wide range of buyers by helping them onto the property ladder. As part of this regeneration other facilities in the area were also developed including a shopping precinct with CCTV surveillance and a new road link. This has not only had a huge impact on the quality of local housing in the area but has also attracted people into the area, causing an influx of newcomers with important implications for the local residents.

### **Research methods and data analysis**

Thirty-three research participants participated in this qualitative case study (13 males; 20 females) over the age of 18 years old (mean age 66.5 years in the focus groups and 51.5 years in the interviews) during a six-month period between May and October 2011. The research included a combination of long-term residents, newer residents and former residents. Age was also deemed to be an important factor as older long-term residents would have lived through changes that accompanied the industrial transition, and experienced the impacts that this may have had on the local community. A theoretically-informed purposive sampling technique was used to recruit local residents of varying ages, some residents who have lived in the area most or all of their lives, some residents who moved out of the area and equally those who have moved into the area. The purpose of this was to gain rich and nuanced understandings of the impact of the local area on different demographics and how the local area may have had an impact on decisions to move into or out of the neighbourhood.

Gaining access to research participants was mainly achieved through establishing key contacts in community organisations that have an interest in the local community. These stakeholders included leaders within two local community centres, a church, and a Sure Start centre (part of a government programme that provides support services for parents and children below the age of four who live in disadvantaged areas). Semi-structured interviews (n=15 comprising 10 male and 8 female participants – some were joint interviews) ranged from 25 minutes to 1.5 hours while focus groups (n=3 comprising 3 male and 13 female participants – one of whom also took part in an interview) were between 50 minutes and 2 hours. The interviews took place in different settings: neutral

spaces (for example, local community centre and church); individuals' homes; and online (Skype) as requested by some individuals due to their different lifestyles. The focus group meetings also took place in different local settings based on the research participants' preferences. One took place in the local community centre, one in the local church hall, and one in a family home. Informed consent was obtained and permission was granted by all research participants to record the focus group and interview conversations and these recordings were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms are used in this paper for anonymity.

Open coding was conducted on interview and focus group transcripts. Thematic coding took place using a qualitative software package, Nvivo (Version 8). Data from focus groups and interviews were first thematically coded using broad categories generated by 'free nodes' in Nvivo before synthesising these into overarching 'tree nodes'.

## **Research findings**

The findings that emerged from this case study in relation to social capital are somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, positive aspects of social capital were narrated by mostly older residents who had previously resided at the former colliery, including social networks, reciprocity, civic engagement and participation. But, on the other hand, less positive aspects of social capital included perceptions of safety, homophily, lack of social integration and 'othering' discourses. Each of these aspects of social capital will be discussed in turn and situated within the broader socio-spatial-temporal processes operating in the area that may have contributed to the development of inclusive and exclusive types of social capital.

### **Social networks**

That fascinated me when I came here. They all had their relatives across the corner; across the road. It was amazing; they had this great network of people. (F, early 60s, focus group)

Research participants discussed the prevalence of social networks. As Dorothy points out in the above quotation the 'great network of people' that constitutes the locality is extremely significant. The majority of residents have lots of close social networks consisting of family, friends and neighbours in the locality, providing highly valued social support. Here is an example:

I suppose because you have got that many family links and family ties with the three villages...so many people are interlinked and if somebody totally new comes and if they haven't got anybody kinda like association it must be hard for them. (M, early 40s, interview)

These social networks were not just voiced by longer-term residents but some of the newer residents as well. For instance, when I asked whether Laura knew her neighbours, she responded:

A lot of them I know. One of my best friends just lives across the road. We know a few others round here as well. I know next door that way – they're fairly new that's moved in that way. My brother and his girlfriend they just live round the corner. (F, early 30s, interview)

The reliance on such social support through her social networks became clear as she went onto explain how public funding to the local Sure Start centre had been cut and that meant that it could no longer supply childminding services to the residents in the neighbourhood and how she would be at a loss without the help of her family around her. She says: 'If I was stuck and if I didn't have my family around then I would have had nothing.'

Similar narratives prevailed in terms of depending on social support from family for childminding, mobility and health problems. One example of this is provided by Susanne when she discusses the main reason why she and her partner had moved back to the local neighbouring area when she started to have children was actually to have family support to care for the children while they went to work:

It was to come back mainly 'cos my mum and dad were going to do the childminding for us. So that was the draw. (F, early 40s, interview)

The significance of family also permeated throughout many of the conversations. One such example of this is provided by Michael, a community project leader local Parish Councillor, in his account below:

Because I mean yes we've got a lot of deprivation, I mean yes we've got a lot of families with issues, but we also have a lot of families that may well have deprivation but they've got a very strong family base and very strong family values and that'll continue regardless of a financial situation. They will always protect, look after and respect their own families and they're very strong about that. And I think that's always one thing that smacks you in the face working round here is the families and the strength of the families. (M, late 20s, interview)

Returning to Bourdieu's definition of social capital being linked to the actual or potential durable social network, we can see the significant presence of social networks (family and friends) within this research both directly in terms of social support (childminding or to help with ill-health) and indirectly (knowing that there is someone there to help if required). These narratives pertaining to social support were gendered with females relying on their social networks (direct benefits) whereas males tended to narrate the indirect (having support available if required) benefits of having social networks. Significantly, however, Kawachi and Berkman (2001) discuss how social contacts may paradoxically increase levels of mental ill-health for females with low resources or strain on those that are providing the support to others, which highlights the potential detrimental aspects of having access to social support for the giver – those who cared for others in this research were predominantly female so this may have some relevance in this context but this was never expressed by any of research participants in this study.

### **Reciprocity**

Reciprocity (neighbourliness) was another tenet of social capital that emerged in the research. An older resident whose husband worked in the colliery before it closed down discussed the reasons why they never wanted to leave the area after the closure of the mine.

I mean we've got friends round about. We never bother each other but I've got good neighbours...they're there if I need them...you can rely on them. (F, early 80s, interview)

However, when she compared the neighbourliness to when she still lived at the colliery this reciprocity was much less. When the colliery closed and the residents were relocated she said that 'everybody just seemed to go on their own' and this 'spoiled the community'. Despite attempts to reinforce this community spirit in the new location by essentially trying to re-create the community in the new part of the village with the same street names, there was a 'shift'; not just a spatial shift but an imaginary shift. Bailly (1993) states that 'the interweaving of time and space conforms to this logic of real and imaginary' (p 249) and this happens through spatial connotations that develop, in other words how we make associations with space and the cultural and symbolic signifiers that

become ingrained in that space making them inseparable. This may partly explain why the relocation of residents did not fully manage to re-capture the sense of community that was previously felt. However, and what is important is that, the characteristics associated with the coal-mining industry, such as camaraderie, trust and reciprocity, permeated into the local community and social capital was sustained by the older residents continuing to host community events and raising funds for communal groups as discussed shortly; but, this social capital was not equally distributed among residents, which will become apparent in sections to follow.

### **Civic engagement and participation in the community**

Inevitably there were profound changes to the once buoyant community spirit; however, it appeared that community still featured as being important for many of the residents. For instance, in a focus group at one of the community centres, it was discovered that the residents raise money through a weekly draw in order to enable groups to meet in the centre and to continue local meetings regarding the safety of the area, as discussed later. The Resident's Association pay rent and find the funds to host such groups and meetings and when asked why they do this one of the residents responded as follows:

This is 'cos we're like the old [named after the former colliery] still trying to keep the community together. (F, late 60s, focus group)

Certainly, for some longer-term residents 'keeping the community together' is a key concern which can be traced back to the mining days when they used to come together for celebration and commiseration alike. The role of time here is significant since it shows that the past is shaping the present social values such as is demonstrated by the strength of older generation community. Carpiano (2007) argues that resources can be drawn upon by group members either in the absence of, or in conjunction with, economic capital. This seemed to resonate with the participants in this study as they talked about the importance of having these shared resources in the local community centre despite the fact that these resources are not funded by the Council but by the local residents themselves, perhaps further reinforcing this notion of social capital according to a resource-based definition which has been shaped over time largely due to the industrial heritage. However, such shared resources were also discussed in a negative context in one of the focus groups when participants in the Mother's Union lamented over the closure of Parish Hall. The leader of the Mother's Union in her early sixties says:

I guess that [Parish Hall] was one community building that everybody could do things in whereas now we've got two that tends to split things anyway because you've got the community centre and [name of the other community centre] fighting each other for who does what where.

Evidently, this divide has had an impact on the community members that use these social resources and ultimately led to a social divide. Contrary to the purpose of such community resources, this social division has counter-intuitively distanced community members rather than bringing them closer together, reflecting the potential exclusiveness of social capital.

### **Perceptions of safety**

Other negative aspects arose when comparisons were made between how the community used to be and how it is now, albeit in a nostalgic way:

[F]rom a child's point of view I think how it's changed is when we were growing up even your neighbours and people in the next village they were looking after you. You know they

treat you just like they treat their own. So if you did anything then you got told off then and you got a slap off them then you went home and got a slap off your mam. But it was like safer wellbeing; it was comfortable for us children growing up. Our dads all worked together so they you know watched each other's back. (M, mid-40s, focus group)

This reinforces the social significance of the history of coal-mining industry, which created mutual bonds in the community and a great sense of emotional wellbeing in terms of perceptions of safety. Given that social trust has been argued to help societies function and underpins social capital, according to Putnam (1993), this is another example whereby social capital has been shaped by the past in relation to the coal-mining industry.

There was a local area initiative referred to as 'Beat' meetings which also contributed to feeling safe and keeping crime levels down. A local police officer comes once a month and reports on the crimes recorded in the local vicinity. Local residents have the opportunity to come to the meetings and voice any concerns they may have. These meetings have been well received so much so that the Resident's Association paid for this resource to be continued after the initial funding for the project came to an end as they felt it was worth keeping:

They [Resident's Association] agreed that it was a success and they agreed it was a good way of dealing with community tensions and feelings and getting community involved. (M, mid 40s, local police officer, interview)

However, there was a stark age divide in the level of perceived safety in the area. One female in her thirties said: 'I'm not perturbed by the rise [in crime]. It's petty theft; it's just petty burglary at the end of the day. It's how people survive in a recession.' In contrast, an older female in her sixties from one of the focus groups said that 'I think the older people feel intimidated' by the young people who congregate outside the shops at night. What is important is that the males who participated in the research, despite being among the older generation, did not have any experience of intimidation or perceived the neighbourhood to be unsafe.

### **Lack of social integration**

Social integration was a bone of contention for some residents. An interesting exchange took place between a wife in her forties (who had moved into the area when she got married) and her husband in his forties (born in the area). The wife, Louise, shares her experiences of feeling like an 'outsider' while her husband, Peter, disagrees with her assertion about the community's exclusiveness:

Louise: And this was very tick [cliquey]. I mean I've lived here for about 29 years and I'm still considered like an outsider.

Peter: I think what Louise means by clicky [cliquey] is it's clicky now.

Louise: Even now it's still the same.

Peter: I know but in the past it wasn't clicky.

Louise: No, when I was growing up...

Peter: When we were young it was never clicky. Everybody was, you know, it was a proper community.

Louise: But it was clicky for me.

Peter: Aye, but...



Louise: You don't know what it's like coming into a community.

As Louise points out, even now, despite living in the area for a substantial amount of time, she still feels like an outsider and not fully accepted by the long-standing community. Peter, on the other hand, a resident from birth who previously lived at the colliery, finds it hard to accept the difficulties for Louise in terms of social integration and acceptance from locals, possibly because of his positive experiences and memories of the mining community. As mentioned in the introduction, 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are two key constructs that manifested in many of the conversations. This outsider term was also used by another female resident who moved into the locality, just as Louise previously described her experience of feeling like an outsider too when she married a local man and moved into the area over 25 years ago.

Yeah because I think with having children...It used to be a really tight-knit community and at first you did feel like an outsider but I think with having children and going to schools and to like the mother-toddlers and things like that you sharp got in. But I think if I didn't have kids it would have been a lot harder. (F, early 40s, interview)

Christine, a caretaker at one of the local community centres, says:

Well, really, I couldn't tell you many of the people that live in the new houses. They don't seem to get involved in anything that's on in here. They seem to keep themselves to themselves. I don't know if they're just like young commuters or working people that have bought here because it's basically a good access route to Alnwick, Morpeth, Newcastle, you know what I mean? So I don't know. They don't seem to get involved in village...you know like if we have a community event on it's the same faces that attend all the events that are on. We don't seem to be able to drag any of the newcomers into it.

Christine, herself, experienced difficulties integrating into the community when she moved into the area from another part of the North East following her marriage. She only managed to integrate into the community after having children. This resonated with other discussions related to meeting people; by taking their children to school, Sure Start or by attending the Mother's Union at the local church they managed to become accepted by locals. Without this connection they felt that it would have been more difficult to integrate. These institutions (Sure Start, schools and church) were more conducive to them meeting and socialising with other mothers, thus building social ties and networks through these spheres of life as opposed to industrial ties. The social reproduction of inequalities parallels Bourdieu's example (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) of French schools being associated with parent's (or more specifically at the time of writing, father's) social class but in this instance it is gender that predisposes female residents to reduced social integration compared to male counterparts.

Accessing social capital can be differentially experienced by males and females. Lin (1999, p 467) argues that 'social capital is contingent on initial positions in the social hierarchies as well as on extensivity of social ties', again echoing Bourdieu's work. Therefore, it might be understandable why some of the female residents who moved into the area due to marriage had difficulties integrating and consequently differential access to social capital compared to males. However, Daniel, a newcomer in his thirties who lived in the area for a year, also found it difficult to build friendships with the 'older, more established residents'. He only managed to form friendships with other relatively new residents in the new build houses close to where he lives. Therefore, it is fair to say that the difficulty of social integration into a tight-knit community is not only limited to females.

Dorothy from one of the community focus groups reinforces the lack of social mix between the longer-term and newer residents who moved into the area after housing regeneration in the 1990s.

They have built a lot of new houses. Private houses down near [name omitted] area. But we haven't seen very many come to church from there. They haven't joined in the community.  
(F, early 60s, focus group)

In an interview with a female resident in one of these newer, private houses, there was a reluctance to integrate into the local community and this prevented them from doing any social things locally.

That's one thing that's a down side for us. I mean there's the club but to be honest I wouldn't go in there 'cos if you haven't lived here all your life you're not local...I think there is a bit of a divide.

Social division is therefore a by-product of homogeneous social networks which results in unequal access to social resources for the newer residents, reflecting the 'divisive' and more negative aspects of social capital (Cairns, 2013). We can map these findings onto Cattell's East London network typologies (2001) consisting of homogeneous/ traditional network typology (which includes a small number of network groups but extensive networks/a network made up of family, neighbours, ex-workmates) versus the socially excluded typology (a small number of network groups and a small number of individuals within these, including newcomers and unemployed).

### **Homophily**

Homophily is a term that has been explored in social capital literature as a lens for considering its darker side. Recently this was examined by Rostila (2013) who empirically tested the well-known phrase 'birds of a feather flock together' through an exploration of migrant homophily in a Swedish context whereby detrimental health effects were found for migrants with highly homogeneous and closed networks. McPherson et al (2001) argue that the most common cause of homophily is space; we are more likely to be similar to those that are closer to us in terms of geographic location and given the isolation of the former colliery, this argument can be applied to this case study.

I mean it's not anywhere near as strong now but like when we came from... 'Cos everybody moved into the same streets...and for a while it was before other people started moving away and other people coming in. It was just like a kind of an extension really. 'Cos it was really insular. It is just a sense of belonging. I really feel this is where I belong...Not in a kinda parochial sort of...but like sort of my heart is here. (M, mid 40s, interview)

The term 'insular' used by Derek invokes a sense of closeness. However, it also implies that the community is inward-looking, which has also been critically discussed in social capital literature in relation to homogeneous groups (Ferlander, 2007) and this may have negative implications. It may be argued that certain combinations of 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital may lead to the formation of social divisions (Cairns, 2013), which has also been shown in MacDonald et al's (2005) study of 'socially excluded' young people in Teesside, North East England. These authors discuss the paucity of weak ties often present in deprived areas. Accordingly, strong (or bonding) social capital enables people to 'get by' (practical and emotional support) rather than weak (or bridging) capital that may provide people with a platform to become socially mobile (for example, accessing employment opportunities to transcend socio-economic circumstances).

## Othering

The influx of newcomers into a once tight-knit community has been difficult for long-term residents to adjust to, leading to a social construction of the 'other'. Popay et al (2003) found that the other was socially constructed in contrast to the well-established community; the 'improper people' (p 65) in her study. In the same vein, in this case study, there was suspicion and cynical attitudes directed at residents moving into the area. Portes (1998) considers mistrust of others to be one of the negative features of homogeneous social capital. For instance, Derek openly talks about some of the problems that longer-term residents associated with the influx of newcomers, for example stealing:

[T]hey did bring a lot of problem families into the area in the '90s and it became a bit sorta wild. We used to call it the Wild West down here... 'Cos it came as a shock for me that anyone from this area would steal, even anybody I don't know, do you know what I mean? I was like in my 20s and thought that's just astonishing that anybody would steal around here and now it is kinda... I dunno it's just a thing that comes from age and experience. You become more cynical. (M, mid 40s, interview)

Derek described the 'policies' of the local council using the analogy of a 'dumping ground': 'Yeah, council housing. It seemed to be like policy. Well, I cannae say that but it was like a kind of a bit of a dumping ground, you know.'

This suspicion and dislike of newcomers is echoed by Pauline:

Problem families. They fetched the problem families over and we started to get a lot of trouble, didn't we? (F, late 60s, interview)

The very phrasing of 'problem families' is problematic in itself since it contributes to unhelpful 'us' and 'them' discourses. This othering first started in the 1990s which coincided with the first phase of housing regeneration, but it continued into the second phase with the development of private houses consisting of primarily young commuters. For instance, an older female resident complains 'some are stuck up like!', which is in stark contrast to the olden days when 'everybody had nowt [nothing]'. Such tensions have manifested over the past decade resulting in even greater (social) distancing despite spatial proximity again reinforcing the temporality underpinning social capital, which partly contradicts McPherson's (2001) argument that the cause of homophily is space (based on geographic location) – in this case spatial proximity is not enough to bridge social characteristics dividing the older term and newer residents. It is here that the temporal and social dimensions of social capital become integral to understanding this lack of social integration, and to a certain extent symbolic (related to the nostalgic sentiment of the coal-mining community).

Therefore, these research findings demonstrate that space and time have contributed to the shaping of inclusionary and exclusionary processes related to social capital's (de)construction and it is necessary to consider them as contingent. Equally age, gender, length of duration and social status (linked to coal-mining industry) can have an impact on the extent of accessible social capital. Social capital can therefore function in both a socially exclusive and inclusive way (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004).

## Conclusion

To conclude, these case study findings reveal somewhat contradictory narratives related to social capital. For homogeneous groups of individuals (older, former colliery residents) social capital appeared to operate in a beneficial way in terms of status (predominantly for male residents), strong social cohesion and support. However, arguably this exclusive social network of older residents may

preclude the inclusion of newer residents contributing to social divides in the wider community despite well-intentioned efforts to include newer residents into community events. There were apparent differences in types of social capital experienced according to demographics (age and gender) with females typically relying on the practical benefits of having social support as part of their family network (for help with childcare or ill-health) and males in terms of knowing that there is support from neighbours when required and the social status that came with being connected to the former coal-mining industry. The area's industrial history is relevant for understanding the tight-knit community that has evolved for those residents that have been in the area since the former mine was in operation. The location of housing is also important to understand the spatial separation of old and new residents and has implications in terms of social integration, participation and engagement with the wider community. Social capital is therefore not equally distributed across this area. These mixed findings reveal the complex nature of social relations and the difficulty in ascertaining the benefits of high levels of social capital in a community since not everyone may benefit equally or positively – it largely depends on who is on the inside.

This social capital concept has received scepticism over it being used to serve neoliberal agendas. Holt (2008) argues that discourses surrounding social capital, especially within Putnam's work, are bound up with neoliberal politics that shifts the causes of inequality, hardship and exclusion away from the political economy and onto individuals' and groups' civic engagement (p 230). This political discourse surrounding social capital makes it naively appear that social capital is a cheap fix to solve problems of economic inequality but fails to consider the social inequalities that may result from not being able to acquire access to such social capital if it is unevenly distributed. This is perhaps why Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital that recognises the potential of social capital to function in a way that actually widens, rather than narrows, inequalities is important. As such, this paper treats social capital with caution. A lack of critical engagement with this concept may result in counterproductive initiatives trying to foster social capital in communities with perhaps unintended effects, which is why it is imperative that policy makers and practitioners working with this concept recognise the multifaceted aspects of social capital. On the one hand, social capital has been shown to be positive for some community members. But, on the other hand, it can reinforce homogeneous social bonds and exclusivity which may widen social inequalities. In taking this concept forward we must be sensitive to the contexts within which social capital operates and who is on the inside and who is outside.

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